

# 'N ChaiLights

## A Cross Curricular Spotlight: Refugee Experiences



At the NEMJDS, we embrace our Jewish and American values as we engage with our world. In class, we look at what is going on in our world from a perspective rooted in our values. Throughout the year, our seventh and eighth graders have looked at contemporary and historic refugee experiences. At the beginning of the year, students heard from alumnus Mack Krell about his experiences working with Syrian refugees in Berlin.

In Language Arts, students recently read the book *Inside Out and Back Again*. This Newbery award winning novel details the struggles of a Vietnamese ten year old girl in 1975 who moves from Saigon to Alabama. This book explains the young girl's culture, the choices she must make, and also her struggles assimilating into American culture. Throughout the book, students acknowledged the significance of universal experiences. Students then used their research skills to analyze other refugee and immigrant experiences. Students identified trends as they researched. For example, seventh grader Esty looked at the similarities between those leaving their homeland by boat and seventh grader Sofia pointed out the role fear plays in shaping how people and countries interact with refugees. Students have also used the student news platform NewsEla to read articles related to marginalized people's experiences, from those with disabilities to children who survived experiences in war-torn nations.

Additionally, in Israeli History, students learned about Israel taking in Vietnamese refugees in the seventies. Students read an article which explained, "In his first official act, newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin made the Vietnamese citizens of Israel." Students discussed how Begin's European Jewish experience and Jewish values could have impacted his decision. Later in the year, in Hebrew class, students are going to analyze a song which explains an Ethiopian immigrant's journey to Israel.

Through these lessons and connections, our students are able to engage critically with our world and also learn how their ancestry and values relate.